Daisy:

The Best Way for her to Grow

Case Study

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Introduction

For this Case Study, I was placed at a Friends School, Bluewood Friends, in a Kindergarten/First Grade classroom. Gretchen, my mentor teacher, was great to work with and this experience helped me better understand how to develop appropriate activities and instruction for a particular student. Gretchen paired me up with Daisy, a first grader in her classroom and allowed me to come in three times a week during the Reading/Writing period. Through observations, interviews, and analyzing Daisy’s work, I was able to continually create learning opportunities for her that I believed would best increase both interest and knowledge regarding reading and writing.

Personally, I feel that it is important to note that children need to first be comfortable with you in order to trust you and work with you. After first meeting Daisy, I was sure to introduce myself and let her know a little bit about me in order to find common ground and begin building a friendship. If you want children to listen to you and absorb the information you are teaching, you must first show them that you also listen to them and that what they are saying is just as important. Hearing and listening are two very different terms. While hearing is mechanical and not necessarily requiring attention, listening requires attention, concentration, and comprehension of what someone is saying. Even at such a young age, I think students should be doing more than just collecting facts or information; they need to engage in authentic learning and determine how the information affects them. People retain information longer and learn more when they are made personal or involve them.

Therefore, while collecting data and discovering Daisy’s world, I was figuring out how to best connect literature to her so she could build on her own skills and also inquire further meaning. As far as planning goes, coming up with an essential question (or big question) was difficult because I needed something that was intellectually engaging and stimulate ongoing thinking and inquiry. It is call a BIG question because it is used to raise more questions, spark discussion, and deeper thinking. It is important to remember that a student’s answers are allowed to change as they continue to make meaning and it is important for teachers to let their students know that. I truly did shape my lessons around the information I gathered through the artifacts and make small adaptations during instruction if I knew that was what it would take to achieve learning with Daisy.

Observation (artifact 1) Annotations and Connections to other Artifacts

Observing Daisy was a great way for me to get to know her on both an academic and social level. Daisy is always compliant during instructional time and she is an extremely hard worker. When given the opportunity to work with peers, she always does. She does not seem to have any social problems with peers within the classroom, which includes her twin brother. Daisy frequently raises her hand to answer questions and stays on task for the most part. When reading with other students, she is engaged in the reading experience, but does stray and talk about interests rather than focusing on the reading for the whole time. I was able to see that she enjoys reading goofy books through observations and infer that her not-too-outgoing-not-too-reserved personality makes her a very likable person within the classroom community. Seeing her interest in reading silly books provided me a basis for planning. She also enjoys writing about recent or upcoming events in her life; things she is excited about. I already knew that if I could get her excited about my lessons, I would have no problem engaging her in any activity I had planned.

Student Interview (artifact 2) Annotations and Connections to other Artifacts

This interview was really a breakthrough moment for Daisy and I. It wasn’t just question, answer, question, answer. We got to establish common interests and I got to know her pretty well. She really got the idea that I did care what she liked and didn’t like. I think this excited her because I was asking questions about both learning and what she liked to do for fun. Many times, the two are separated, but bringing them together is when students are really able to make meaning for themselves. Learning about Daisy first hand helped me to design instruction and feel more comfortable with where I was headed. Establishing knowledge about Daisy and acquiring a taste of what it would be like to work with her put my nerves at ease and gave me excitement about what the future held. It is also important for me to note that at first, she was more timid talking to me than when she was talking to her peers, but when she saw that I was interested in gymnastics and dance, she opened right up.

Teacher Interview (artifact 3) Annotations and Connections to other Artifacts

My interview with Gretchen was wonderful because I got a feel for how she worked with Daisy and where she stands academically. She verified her interests and provided more detail about her life and how she learned best. She explained that she was thinking about a few students to pair me with and then after meeting me, knew that Daisy and I would be a great match. I appreciate her taking the time to choose a student that she thought would work well with me because it is an important aspect of life. Some partnerships are harder to endure, but if you are paired with the right person you can make great gains. I think she chose the perfect student for me and I was so glad to be given the opportunity to have so much freedom while creating lessons for her. Gretchen knew Daisy really well and gave me good tips about working with her. Teachers are definitely a great place to go when collecting information about one of his or her students. I noticed that she knew a lot of what Daisy had told me already and just deepened my knowledge on how she learned best.

Other Interview (artifact 4) Annotations and Connections to other Artifacts

I did my second interview with the class aide because she got to see and work with Daisy a lot. While a lot of the information was similar to my previous two interviews, she was able to give me even further insight. It is always a good idea to get multiple opinions because if not, you are running the risk of missing out on interesting things! She also verified a lot of information, like Daisy is very hands-on and gets along with her peers. Sometimes when students are the well-behaved ones in the classroom, they tend to go unnoticed, so it was nice to see that both of the adults in the classroom recognized her contributions to the classroom environment. I found out that Daisy does not seem bothered by any specific subject, but art is by far her favorite. She truly loves any form of expressing herself in a unique and fun way.

Student Sample Work (artifact 5) Annotations and Connections to other Artifacts

I loved getting to look at Daisy’s work! Because I was working with her on reading and writing, it was awesome to see her favorite pieces and her day-to-day practice as well. I uploaded photos of her water park story and a journal entry. These two samples show the way she phonetically sounds out words on her own and where she is at with her writing. The pictures she draws are very detailed and precisely colored. Not all students take the time to draw out and color their illustrations, but it is something Daisy does because it is what she enjoys. Moreover, as I was going through her writing practice book, I noticed that the pictures (black and white) throughout the writing book were nicely shaded in with pencil. I was so impressed that a first grader knew how to shade and took the time to do that after (or before, I don’t really know) she completed her writing practice for the day. Seeing the samples of work showed me that it was not a chore for her to write about the things she enjoyed doing. It was more fun because then she got to share all the fun things she had done or was excited to do and I think Gretchen did a great job encouraging that.

Linguistic Analysis

Depending on the situation she was in, Daisy would be more or less talkative. For example, when I would ask her questions about school-related things, she would simply answer the question. When I would ask her about what she did for fun, I would get a huge excited explanation! She loves talking about the things she is passionate about. This was a good base to see if I could incorporate these things into learning to make her as excited about it as possible. She also told me that at home she was way louder than she was at school. This showed me that she knows what is acceptable based on where she is. At home, she has the freedom to play outside more and is less reserved than at school. After viewing her work and discussing it with Gretchen, it was obvious that Daisy writes according to the “rules” in which they have been taught in class. She sounds out the words and spells them like she hears them. Her work samples also show patterns, such as the final “e” making a long vowel sound. She consistently does this throughout her work and while it is not “technically” correct, it proves that she has reason for why she is spelling this way. She uses kid writing, which is normal for her age and it is perfectly acceptable. Furthermore, she does not speak differently than other students in her class or the area. She acknowledges that Gretchen is an authority figure to a certain extent, but still calls her by her first name because it is a Friends school. That means that they do not believe that one person should really be held above others and they should respect everyone the same. The teachers are really a guide for learning and are there to motivate and engage students in learning with them.

Reading Strategies Analysis

In Gretchen’s classroom, students are given a lot of choice and opportunities to express themselves in any way they choose. The children are taught to “read the room” and use words from all around to come up with good sentences on their own and they have reminder posters to refer to. These posters include the strategies that they use based on the Daily Five. The Daily Five includes: read to self (sit by self and read box from book box), read to someone (echo read, choral read, or I read, you read), word work (use different resources to write down words they know in a notebook), work on writing (write own stories in a notebook), and listen to reading (use headphones to listen to reading while following along). For reading with a partner, students must sit EEKK style. This means elbow, elbow, knee, knee so that you are directly next to your partner and can partner read properly. Daisy knew everything about the methods they used in class, so it was clear to me that the strategy they have implemented is effective. When I asked her how she knew that a book was on her reading level, she knows that before reading she needs to do the five-word test. She opens a book to a random page and if she cannot read 5 or more words on the page, the book is too hard for her and she simply chooses another one. These strategies that they teach to the students really work because it teaches them to problem solve and gives them a sense of independence and choice.

One thing I noticed that Daisy had a bit of a hard time with was some new vocabulary. This was perfectly predictable because the first time you ever see a word, or if a word has more than one meaning, it can be confusing. So, when I was planning, I decided to work in some new vocabulary, as well as play with words. This way, Daisy could have fun with words and learn authentically at the same time. It was fun for us to discuss new words and even play games with familiar rhyming words. Furthermore, I would use strategies that I have learned and incorporated them in my planning for Daisy. She used *Come Back Amelia Bedelia* as a “mentor text” in order to come up with her own mini book and thus decide how Amelia would mix up the meaning of words someone says to her. We also did a rhyming Dr. Seuss game and talked about the meaning of words. There are so many strategies people can use to have fun and support learning at the same time.

Literacy Sponsorship Analysis

Daisy is a lucky little girl because she goes to a school that encourages unique learning. She gets so much choice, especially when it comes to expression through reading and writing. Her parents read with her at home and she truly does like reading. It is also nice that she always had her father modeling his interest in books because he is a children’s book illustrator. She learned to create her own books with cardboard, string, and cloth, or really anything she can get her hands on. The creativity she got from her parents fosters a lot of imagination and she has always been encouraged to take joy in expressing herself.

Daisy’s interest in gymnastics, dance, pets, and other fun activities results in her writing and talking primarily about these topics. Therefore, a way to motivate her to speak, write, and read is to allow her to focus on these topics when choosing to read, write, and speak. I know it is not ideal to just focus on specific things all the time, but these topics she enjoys can also be used as a bridge to other similar topics and Daisy can spur interest in numerous things. To me, it is important to get students interested in reading and enjoying literature before they can use it to learn. Of course, while they are enjoying it they are learning as well. For example, Daisy loves Dr. Seuss, so I created a matching Dr. Seuss game that allowed her to practice rhyming and meanings of words while also being hands-on. It is all about tailoring teaching to students in the best way possible.